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SUBJECT: SERBIAN DEFENSE MINISTER VISITS NATO

Classified By: A/DCM W. S. Reid, III, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C) Summary: Serbian Minister of Defense Dragan Sutanovac signed an information security agreement between Serbia and NATO during an October 1 visit to NATO and, in an address to PermReps, he said Serbia will expand its contact with NATO, but criticized the Alliance for taking on the task of reforming Kosovo's security structures. Following the NAC session, Sutanovac met with Ambassador Volker and stressed the importance of exposing Serbs to NATO and the West, and explored public diplomacy options. End summary.

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A new era in NATO-Serbia relations?  
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12. (C) Defense Minister Sutanovac visited NATO October 1 to sign an information security agreement between Serbia and NATO. In 2001 Serbia began a constructive relationship with NATO, which culminated in 2006's decision to join NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. However, with mounting tension over Kosovo, Serbia's relations with NATO cooled to the point that after Kosovo's declaration of independence in February, Serbia stopped cooperating with NATO's Defence Planning and Policy division. With recent elections heralding the emergence of a more pro-Europe government, Serbia appears to be looking to re-energize its engagement with NATO, beginning with Wednesday's signing of the information security agreement.

13. (C) Following the signing by Sutanovac and SYG Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, Sutanovac briefed the NAC on Serbia's views on current events. The SYG observed that, despite Serbia's pledge when it joined PfP to actively engage with NATO, there had not been any "speedy development" in the relationship. The SYG stated that with the signing he welcomed Serbia's intention to fully engage in PfP and defense reform. He characterized the signing of the agreement as a step in the right direction and a prerequisite for mil-to-mil cooperation, and said that while NATO and Serbia's opinions on Kosovo might have differed in the past - and might in the future - both parties want to promote stability in the region.

14. (C) Sutanovac echoed the SYG's comments, calling the signing a "signature moment" for Serbia's engagement in PfP and with NATO. He said that following democratic elections in July, Serbia's priorities are full EU membership, establishing that Kosovo is not treated as an exceptional case regarding Serbia's territorial integrity, combating corruption and promoting the rule of law. He was quick to

say that although Serbia considered Kosovo's declaration of independence illegal, Serbia was choosing to fight it in a constructive manner through the rule of law -- by seeking the opinion of the ICJ. Sutanovac offered that cooperation between Serbian forces and KFOR illustrated further proof of working within constructive means to resolve disputes. He was adamant in asserting Serbia's opposition to NATO's New Tasks for KFOR -- demobilizing the Kosovo Protection Corps (KPC) and standing up the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) -- since the Ahtisaari Plan which laid out these tasks for NATO had not been approved by the UNSC, and said that the New Tasks might pose future problems between NATO and Serbia. He said that he supports EU engagement in Kosovo, but that the UN needed to approve the EULEX mandate.

15. (C) On the positive side, Sutanovac stated that a majority of Serbian public opinion supports greater engagement with PfP, although a much larger majority supports EU aspirations. He reported that Serbia will soon open a NATO mission and start engaging in the PfP Planning and Review Process (PARP), the Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP), and PfP exercises. Serbia will consider possible contributions to peacekeeping operations and is working on improving the interoperability of its forces and soldiers' standards of living. Sutanovac thanked Norway for its assistance as the lead nation of its NATO Trust Fund, which seeks to help redundant military personnel find new jobs. Serbia will continue to work on increasing educational programs for its military and fostering better transparency on political and military topics.

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The Allies question Serbia's cooperation  
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16. (C) Comments from Allies acknowledged cooperation of the Serbian armed forces with KFOR, supported Serbia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, applauded its move to sign the security agreement and re-engage with NATO, and encouraged Serbia to work on NATO public diplomacy efforts and look to the future. Ambassador Volker mentioned that nine years ago, during his previous assignment to NATO, the Alliance was dealing with a very different Serbia than the one that appeared today. He applauded Serbia's efforts to establish a mission at NATO, and pledged to support Serbia in developing its relationship with NATO at its chosen pace. Several PermReps, including Ambassador Volker, commented that the stand-down of the KPC, the stand-up of a democratically-controlled, lightly-armed KSF, and the deployment of EULEX into northern Kosovo were important and even in Belgrade's interests. In reference to NATO's New Tasks for KFOR, Norway suggested that Serbia and NATO must "agree to disagree," and Germany commented that NATO's New Tasks were within KFOR's mandate to provide for a safe and secure environment. The Deputy Chairman of the Military Committee, Lieutenant General Eikenberry, encouraged the renewal of contacts between COMKFOR and the Serbia Chief of Defense. Slovenia asked about Serbia's intention to reverse the down-sizing of its armed forces. Hungary also commented that NATO is not a "demandeur," and Allies stand ready to offer assistance when the Serbians ask for it. The Czech and Greek PermReps said that re-engagement with PfP is only the first step, but were looking for Serbian contributions above and beyond what is merely required in PfP. Regarding Kosovo, the Romanian PermRep reminded Sutanovac that NATO is "status-neutral" in Kosovo and not in the "recognition business." (The Spanish PermRep quickly followed to note that Spain has not recognized Kosovo.) The U.S., Hungary, Romania, Germany, Canada, Belgium, the Netherlands and Croatia lauded Serbia for turning Radovan Karadic over to the ICTY, but pushed for Serbia to cooperate vigorously with The Hague to pursue other war criminals.

17. (C) Sutanovac responded that Serbia's full, democratic control of the armed forces was best displayed in February and March by their professional response to Kosovo's declaration of independence. Regarding NATO's New Tasks, he stated that NATO decided KFOR would do the job, but the

decision damaged NATO's image with the Serbian people. He also criticized NATO's invitation for him to address the NAC on the same day that the Kosovar Minister of Defense would have been at SHAPE attending a KSF donor's conference, which he said created a bad political climate for him back home. (NOTE: A week before, SHAPE moved the conference to October 18. End note.) He upheld Serbia's pledge to find and hand over indicted war criminals. Sutanovac acknowledged the importance of public diplomacy efforts and the need to promote NATO values to the public, but said that Serbia can not "do it alone" because the concept of marketing is a new one for his country. He indicated that NATO needs to show patience because it currently is a problem for Belgrade to allow public cooperation between COMKFOR and the Serbian Chief of Defense. He indicated that Belgrade had the same problem with EULEX, but that EULEX "would come (to) the table" for Belgrade after the vote at the UN on referring the case of Kosovo's independence to the ICJ. He remarked that a split in the Radical Party is contributing to Parliament's inability to agree to contribute to peacekeeping operations. Deputy Secretary General Bisogniero, who chaired the meeting upon the departure of the SYG for another event, closed the discussion by noting that both NATO and Belgrade had a lot of "homework to do" as a result of this interaction.

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Volker-Sutanovac bilateral meeting  
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18. (C) In a separate bilateral meeting that took place after the NAC, Ambassador Volker again voiced his clear and strong support for Serbia's Euro-Atlantic aspirations, and Sutanovac answered that expectations in Serbia for its engagement with the West are high. He said that Serbia needs to find a "soft way" to make progress back home. In response to Ambassador Volker's request for clarification of recent comments made by

President Tadic regarding the partition of Kosovo, Sutanovac responded that Tadic did not "endorse" partition, rather he said that Serbia must "be ready to think about all options." He commented on the Belgrade buildings that have not been repaired since the bombings of the 1990s, but mentioned that he informed Embassy Belgrade that he wants to open a new era in relations. Bearing in mind the public diplomacy challenge, Sutanovac suggested holding an air show in Belgrade that would bring in "NATO aircraft" from multiple countries to be viewed by the public (he promised he could get 100,000 spectators to attend such an event.) Ambassador Volker suggested that NATO stories do not have to feature Afghanistan or Kosovo, but instead human interest stories such as the response to Hurricane Katrina or the Pakistan earthquake. To reinforce the value he places on military exchanges, Sutanovac concluded with an anecdote that he used in the NAC - the story of visiting a military training facility where 600 soldiers were being trained, but only 20 of them had passports and less than two percent had ever traveled out of the country. He said that after meeting an Algerian colonel who was trained at a Serbian facility and spoke Serbian, he has since advocated greater military exchanges, and currently there are 20 Algerian soldiers receiving training in Serbia. Sutanovac also asked about the possibility of bringing Serbians to NATO to gain exposure.

VOLKER